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AUTHOR Denton, Carolyn A.; Hasbrouck, Jan E.
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ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of seven booklets designed to introduce aspects of effective reading instruction that should be considered when teaching reading to students with disabilities. It focuses on essential skill building and teaching activities related to reading passages. The methods described of teaching reading to students with disabilities have been shown to be particularly effective. An introduction discusses general principles for teaching reading to students with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of individually designing a program based on a student's strengths and needs, parent involvement, and academic modifications. Information is organized into the following sections: what supported passage reading is, why it is important, what parents can do, what teachers can do, information for second language learners, and resources. Strategies include reading the story, or part of the story quietly along with the students, having the student read until he or she makes 5-15 mistakes and then teaching those words, reading with prompting to solve new words, teaching students to correct their own errors, reading with expression, reading for meaning, and using classwide peer tutoring. (CR)

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"Supported Passage Reading"

from

Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

by Carolyn A. Denton
Jan E. Hasbrouck
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Prepared by
the PEER Project
(Parents Engaged in Education Reform)

PEER is a project of
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Texas A&M University

September 2000

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1135 Tremont St., Suite 420, Boston, MA 02120

617-236-7210 (voice/TTY) • fax: 617-572-2094 • www.fcsn.org

Parents Engaged in Education Reform (PEER) is a national technical assistance project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. PEER's purpose is to support parents of children with disabilities and their organizations to be informed, active participants in education reform efforts. In addition, to enhance opportunities for early literacy in reading for at-risk students, PEER is providing information and training to parent and community organizations in promising and best practices in literacy.

The Federation for Children with Special Needs is a nonprofit organization based on the philosophy of parents helping parents. Founded in 1974 as a coalition of twelve disability and parent organizations, today the Federation is an independent advocacy organization committed to quality education and health care for all, and to protecting the rights of all children. To this end, the Federation provides information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their organizations, their professional partners, and their communities.

For more information about the PEER Project or the Federation for Children with Special Needs, please contact the Federation's Central Office at:

1135 Tremont St., Suite 420
Boston, MA 02120
617-236-7210
617-572-2094 fax
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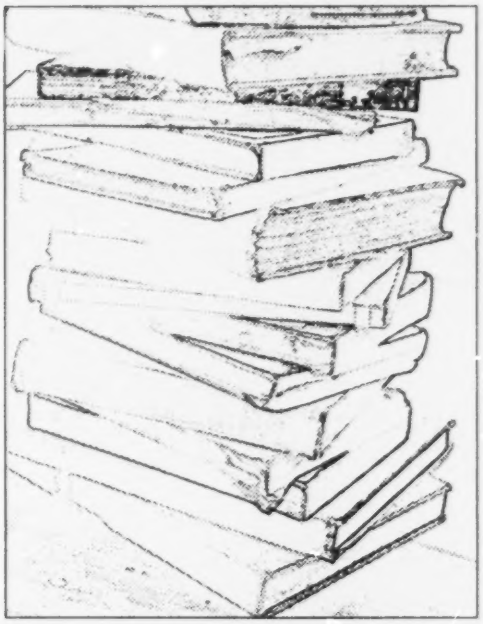
Supported Passage Reading



Supported Passage Reading is the fourth of a seven-part series of Resource Briefs that comprises *Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read: A PEER Resource Booklet.* Titles of Resource Briefs in this series of PEER Literacy Resource Briefs include:

Brief #1: Phonological Awareness

Brief #2: Systematic Phonics Instruction

Brief #3: Word Identification

Brief #4: Supported Passage Reading

Brief #5: Fluent Reading

Brief #6: Reading Comprehension

Brief #7: Early Intervention in Reading

Supported Passage Reading is organized into these sections:

- General principles to keep in mind
- What is supported passage reading?
- Why is it important?
- What can parents and teachers do?
- Resources
- References
- Conclusion

General principles to keep in mind

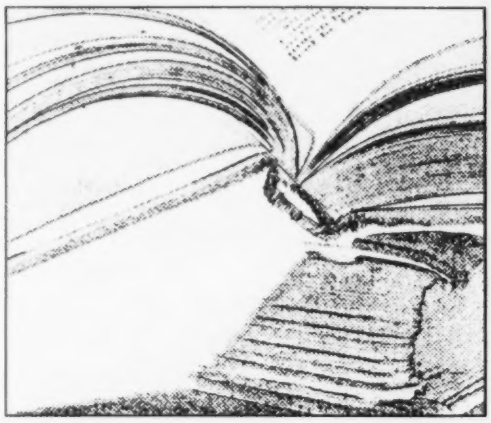
Reading is very important for success in our society, yet as many as one in five students has difficulty learning to read. Most students with learning disabilities, and many students with other types of disabilities, have problems in the areas of reading, writing, and spelling. This **Literacy Resource Brief** introduces parents and teachers to essential skill-building and teaching activities related to reading passages. Methods of teaching reading to students with disabilities described here have been shown to be particularly effective. Some of these methods are used in regular education classrooms for students who are just learning to read (Kindergarten through Grade 2), but they are still relevant and useful for students with disabilities of any age who have not learned to read well. Instructional materials should be selected with an eye toward age appropriateness.

The following key issues in reading instruction for students with disabilities are important regardless of the age or ability level of a student.

- Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school. Parents have the *right* to insist that the school provide instruction designed to help their children with disabilities improve their reading skills. These issues should be addressed in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- Reading programs for students with disabilities should be individually designed based on a student's strengths and needs. Parents and teachers should not make judgments about a student's ability to learn, or about the best way to teach him or her, based solely on a student's disabling condition or label. Every individual student's abilities, needs, and life situation must be carefully evaluated and considered in the IEP in order to design the best reading program for that student.

- Many students with disabilities may need modifications (changes) in the way they receive instruction, and in the way they fulfill class requirements in order to succeed in areas such as science, social studies, and language arts. These modifications are very important, but *they should not take the place of instruction* designed to help students with disabilities improve their reading skills.



Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school.

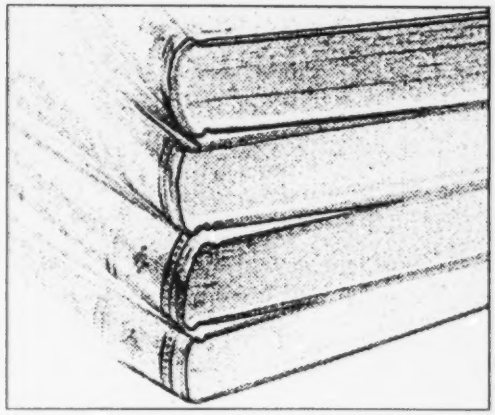
- Parents should, first and always, communicate with their child's teacher(s). Parents can simply ask their child's teacher(s) what can be done to help the child at home. Parents should also recognize themselves and be recognized as important sources of information about their child's interests, abilities, and learning styles. Coordination of school and home efforts is one of the best ways to help a student succeed. Strategies to ensure communication and coordination between school and home can be addressed in the student's IEP.

- The reading material used in reading instruction has to be "not too hard, not too easy," but at the right level for a student. Actual reading of real stories or other material should be part of a student's reading program.

- In the past, some people believed that certain methods of teaching reading were best for students with certain disabilities: that some methods were best for students with brain injury, that others were better for students with learning disabilities, and that still other methods were best for students with mental retardation. This is not the case. The success of a method of teaching reading depends on the content of the program, the way it is taught, the intensity of the instruction (how often and how actively it is taught), and the needs and strengths of the individual student.

- Although different methods of teaching reading may work equally well with students having various disabilities, students benefit when instruction is systematic and structured. Reading skills should be introduced in careful order, and students must be given a great deal of practice and repetition in each skill, so that they master each skill before new ones are introduced.

- **Note for second language learners:** Students who come to school unable to speak English should first be taught



to read in their *native language*. Later, as they gain proficiency in spoken English, they should be taught to extend these skills to reading in English. This practice, however, is not possible in all school situations. Instructional materials may not be available in the child's native language, or there may not be a teacher who can speak and read in the child's native language. If students cannot speak English, and they cannot be taught to read in their native language, they should be given time to develop their proficiency in spoken English before they begin reading instruction. They need to learn English speech sounds and vocabulary. English reading instruction should begin *after* the student can speak English well enough to benefit from instruction.

Reference

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

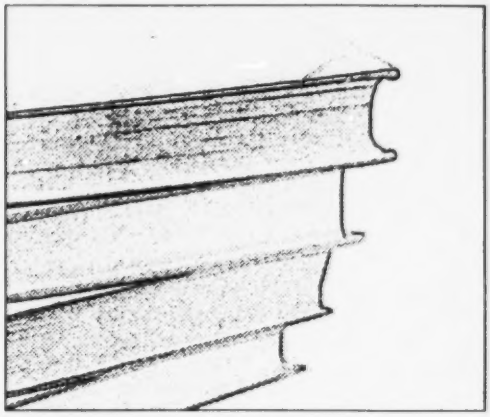
What is supported passage reading?

Passage reading simply means reading actual text (stories, books, or articles). Students with disabilities must be given the opportunity to practice their reading skills by *actually reading*. Every day, students should read two kinds of text:

1. **Stories or articles they can read comfortably by themselves, including those they have read before.** This type of reading can be done silently or orally (out loud), depending on the age and skill level of the student. Students who are in the early stages of reading instruction benefit from reading orally, and teachers can hear errors and give the student feedback during oral reading.

2. **Stories or articles they can read with the help of a more capable reader working beside them.** This keeps the students from practicing their mistakes and forming bad habits. The second type of reading should always be done orally. Reading actual text with the support of an adult or a more advanced student or tutor can help struggling readers improve.

NOTE: Students should spend at least 30-45 minutes per day *actually reading* (besides time spent doing worksheets or learning *about* reading).



***The first and most important rule* about passage reading is that the reading material *must* be at an appropriate level of difficulty...**

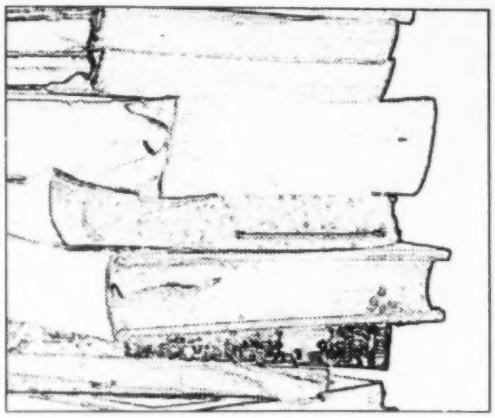
Why is it important?

Students with disabilities need to be taught many separate skills—how to sound out words, how to identify words quickly, and how to understand what they read. These skills are discussed in separate Resource Briefs. Learning these skills is similar to a football player learning how to tackle, pass, or run. Passage reading gives the student the chance to practice all these skills and to understand how they work together in good reading, just as football players need to actually practice playing the game. Likewise, just as a football team needs the support of a coach, students learning to read well need the support of

an adult while they practice reading. The adult is the struggling reader's coach.

What can parents and teachers do?

Parents and teachers can help students with disabilities increase their overall reading ability by using simple methods to support the students' oral (out loud) reading of real stories or articles.



The first and most important rule about passage reading is that the reading material *must* be at an appropriate level of difficulty for the student. If the book or story being read is too difficult, students will become frustrated and see themselves as failures. One quick way to find out if the story is too hard for a student is to count out 100 words in the story or passage and have the student read that section. Count the number of mistakes. If the student makes 10 or more mistakes in 100 words (including words left out or added and words you have to give them), the story is too hard. Choose an easier story. Even without counting words, a parent, teacher, or tutor can often tell when the reading material is too difficult. If the student is making many mistakes while reading, having to work very hard to struggle through the story, and/or is becoming frustrated, the student should be given easier reading material for supported passage reading practice.

Many reading methods used by special educators provide stories that are carefully designed to apply the skills the student has already learned. These stories contain only words that the student can decode (sound out or figure out) successfully. Examples of these reading methods include *Reading Mastery, Read Well, and Corrective Reading,* described in **Brief #1: Systematic Phonics Instruction.**

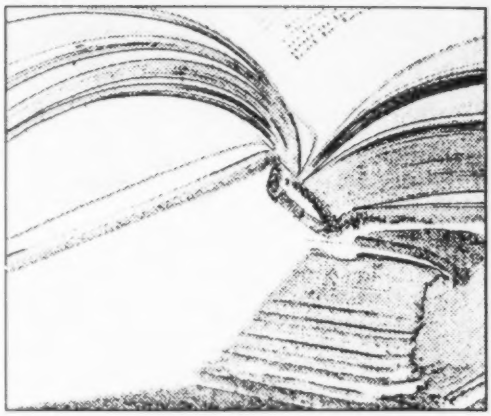
Remember: Supported Passage Reading should be a pleasant experience for a student. Students should feel successful and enjoy reading with you. Be patient, and stop the activity if you or the student become frustrated.

These passage-reading activities have been shown to be effective in helping students with disabilities improve their reading:

- **Repeated Reading Together.** Read the story, or part of the story quietly along with the student. Read slowly enough so that the student can keep up with you. Practice the same story several times together. See **Brief #5: Fluent Reading** for a further description of this method.

- **Reading with Word Practice.** Have the student read until he or she makes 5-15 mistakes. Write down the missed words while the student is reading. After 5-15 mistakes, stop the reading at the end of the next sentence or paragraph. Write the words the student missed on note cards. Teach these words and have the student practice until the words are known and can be said quickly. Then have the student read the same part of the story again. If the student misses one of the words you practiced, simply say the word quietly and quickly as the reading progresses.

- **Reading with Prompting to Solve New Words.** Prompting means giving hints. If a student "gets stuck" on a word while he or she is reading, decide whether it is a word the child *could* sound out. If it is, you can ask the child to start the word and say it slowly. (See the **Brief # 2: Systematic Phonics Instruction** for more on sounding out words.) You can also remind the child to think about what word would make sense in the story. Thinking about what the story is about often makes it easier to read difficult words. Another thing students can try when they come to a difficult word is to look for a pattern (or patterns) in the word that they know. For example, in the word "army," students may recognize the "a-r" pattern, which is like the word "are." Students trying to read the

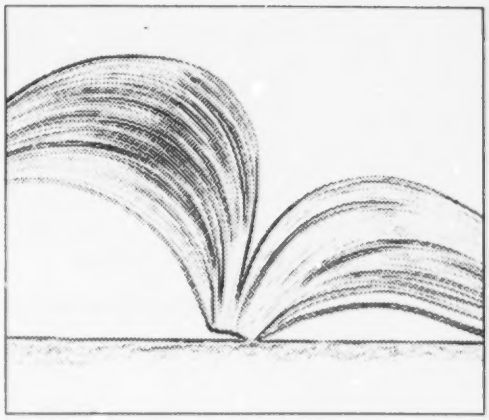


word "awesome," may see the "a-w" pattern which is found in the word "saw," and the "s-o-m-e" of the word "some." Parents and teachers can help the child discover patterns by asking, "What do you know in that word that could help you?"

- **Teaching Students to Correct Their Own Reading Errors.** It is very important that students recognize when they have made a mistake in their reading and try to correct their own errors. Some students tend to read a story almost like a machine, as if the story were just a group of words to be said out loud. They need to be reminded that everything they read must make sense and sound right. If they read something that does not make sense or does not sound right, they need to re-read and try to find and correct their error(s). When students make a mistake, parents and teachers can wait a few seconds before correcting the error to give students time to correct it themselves. If the student makes

a mistake in reading and does not correct it, the parent or teacher can say something like, "Try that again, and make it make sense," or, "Try that again, and make it sound right." These reminders must be given in a pleasant, calm voice. If students cannot find their mistakes, point them out and supply the correct word. Have the student read the sentence again correctly and continue the reading.

- **Reading with Expression.** Many struggling readers read in a flat, choppy "reading voice," and many ignore punctuation marks like periods when they read. They need to learn to read with expression, making the reading sound more like natural speech. Parents and teachers can demonstrate expressive reading for students. This includes demonstrating how to read punctuation marks—stopping at periods, pausing at commas, making questions sound like questions, and using an appropriate tone of voice for direct quotations. Read a sentence, or a few sentences, with expression. Then ask the student to read it in the same way. After a student can do this successfully, ask him or her to read the next few sentences. If the student does not read with expression, demonstrate again, and have them repeat after you or read along with you. Some students have very strong habits of reading with poor expression. It can take months of practice to break these habits.



Many reading methods used by special educators provide stories that are carefully designed to apply the skills the student has already learned. These stories contain only words that the student can decode successfully.

- **Read for Meaning.** It is important that the child reads to find out what the story is about, not just to say the words. **Brief #6: Reading Comprehension** gives suggestions for ways to help students understand and remember what they read.

- **Classwide Peer Tutoring.** Students with disabilities have increased their reading and social skills through classwide peer tutoring. In one type

of peer tutoring, students are put into pairs to work together on reading tasks. One student (the learner) reads to the other one (the tutor), while the tutor scores points on a sheet for every sentence that is read correctly. Tutors also give learners positive feedback as they read. After the reading is done, the tutor asks the learner questions for three minutes. Then the two students switch roles and repeat the procedure.

Conclusion

With proper instruction and support, many more students than previously thought capable of reading can learn to read. Reading can open the door to success, enabling students to live fuller, more independent lives and to succeed in a variety of careers. This **PEER Literacy Resource Brief** has outlined some areas of critical concern in reading education for students with disabilities. When parents and teachers have access to the information they need, they are better equipped to make decisions about students' educational programs.

Resources

Guided Reading (especially the chapter on "Teaching for Strategies," pp. 149-162), by Irene C. Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell, published by Heinemann, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912; ISBN 0-435-08863-7.

How to Tutor in Reading: Guidelines and Competencies, by Richard Parker, Jan E. Hasbrouck, and Carolyn A. Denton (1998), Texas A&M University, Department of Educational Psychology, Mail Stop 4225, College Station, TX 77840-4225. (409) 845-7505.

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